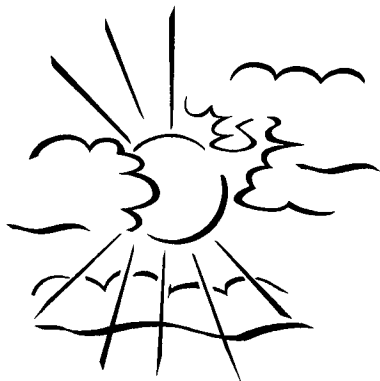


***Department
of
Human
Services***

Prepared by the
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Communications
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Articles in Today's Clips

Friday, May 12, 2006

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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MICHIGAN

Granholt to boost state health plan

Higher incomes would be OK

May 12, 2006

BY CHRIS CHRISTOFF AND KATIE MERX
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITERS

LANSING -- Gov. Jennifer Granholm said Thursday that she would double to 1 million the number of uninsured Michigan adults eligible for her proposed state-sponsored health insurance program.

She would expand a proposal she made in January to include uninsured adults with higher incomes -- many of whom work for small businesses that don't offer health benefits. The higher income adults would have to pay their own insurance premiums, but at a reduced group rate.

Republican leaders said they were skeptical of the plan, which they said seemed like an election-year ploy.

To pull off her idea, Granholm must convince the federal government to give the state an additional \$600 million in Medicaid funds and allow the state to use \$400 million it already has for the new health plan. Janet Olszewski, director of the state Department of Community Health, said Michigan and other states have received similar waivers to get extra federal money for Medicaid programs.

"We are very encouraged by the progress of our negotiations," Granholm said.

Granholm said her plan is similar to a new state universal health insurance plan in Massachusetts and would help the struggling automotive industry and other employers, who pay the cost of medical care for the uninsured through higher insurance premiums. She said auto companies are building more cars in Canada because of its national health care system.

Dana Clarke, president and chief executive officer of Applied Innovation Alliance in West Bloomfield, said he does not insure his nine employees but would if it was cheap enough.

"It's a cost issue. We're looking into it," he said. "Even if the cost was just half, it would make a world of difference. We'd offer it."

Republicans said they feared Granholm's plan would cost the state more money, or that it would require too little in co-payments from low-income patients.

Matt Resch, spokesman for House Speaker Craig DeRoche, R-Novi, said it appeared Granholm was reaching for an election-year advantage.

"The speaker will look at the governor's plan and see how it will work," Resch said.

Ari Adler, spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming, said any state insurance plan should require participants to lead healthier lifestyles to avoid medical problems. "If you continue to focus on treating people once they are sick, you will never get out from under the health care burden," Adler said.

Unlike Massachusetts' health plan, Granholm's proposal would not require individuals and businesses to carry health insurance. She said her plan would make health insurance affordable while it subsidizes health care for the poorest residents.

Adults with incomes less than 200% of the federal poverty level -- \$33,200 for a family of two children and one adult -- who do not qualify for Medicaid or other health coverage would get low-cost coverage on a sliding payment scale, depending on their income.

Small businesses would pay cheaper group insurance premiums because they would pool their employees with workers from many other small companies. The state would help enroll employees and administer the health plans, which Granholm said would save the businesses time and money.

The private health plans would cover basic health services, including emergency and mental health care.

Although Granholm's plan is aimed at businesses that have no employee health insurance, it may attract some that do.

"I'd be interested in exploring what it does and what it costs compared with the insurance we have," said Tim Fagan, owner of Coach's Catastrophe Cleaning and Restoration Services in Ypsilanti.

He said Coach's has insured its employees since 1985 but finds it increasingly difficult.

"In the last four years, it's been more insurance premium for less insurance coverage," Fagan said. "Some of our employees opt totally out of the health plan because they just can't afford it."

Contact CHRIS CHRISTOFF at 517-372-8660 or christoff@freepress.com.

LOW-COST OPTIONS

- Some low-cost health care plans already are available to businesses.

- **Health 1st America.** Offered through the Detroit Regional Chamber, Health 1st is a low-cost indemnity plan available to individuals and employer groups. Call 866-412-0382.

- **Four Star.** Wayne County's four largest hospital systems make available a one-third share health care program. The programs split a low-cost premium among a nonprofit, the employer and employee. Get information at 866-780-6655.

- **HealthChoice.** This is a Wayne County one-third share program. For information, call 800-935-5669.

Katie Merx

Friday, May 12, 2006

Granholt unveils health care proposal Governor's plan covers 1.1M uninsured in Mich. who are working poor or below poverty level.

Mark Hornbeck / Detroit News Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- Gov. Jennifer Granholm unveiled a universal health care plan for Michigan on Thursday designed to cover all 1.1 million state residents who are currently uninsured.

The proposal, patterned after a law recently passed in Massachusetts, is an expansion of a plan announced in January that would provide health coverage to the 550,000 Michiganians below 200 percent of the poverty level -- which is \$38,700 for a family of four.

Her new plan also would offer health care insurance to the working poor above that level who don't have coverage. The state would subsidize premiums on a sliding scale depending on family income. It's uncertain how much participants would have to pay.

"We want everyone to have access to quality health care in an affordable way," Granholm said at Sparrow Hospital in Lansing.

She said her plan would also provide incentives to small businesses to participate.

The state is negotiating for a federal Medicaid waiver by the end of the year to the offer the program by April of 2007. It would also require legislative approval.

The state would use about \$400 million in community mental health money to draw a \$600 million federal match to pay for the program, Granholm said.

The Michigan proposal would mirror the Massachusetts version in providing coverage to the uninsured but, unlike Massachusetts, Michigan residents would not be required to have coverage.

"We're providing them an offer they can't refuse," Granholm said.

Legislative Republicans said they haven't seen the details of the plan.

"We still have questions about costs to the state and whether any of it is being spent to encourage healthier living," said Ari Adler, spokesman for Senate Republican Leader Ken Sikkema.

Dr. Robert Femia, medical director at Sparrow, said the plan would reduce the number of uninsured people who show up at emergency rooms in advanced stages of illness.

You can reach Mark Hornbeck at (313) 222-2470 or mhornbeck@detnews.com.

Published May 12, 2006

Health plan aids Mich. uninsured

Governor wants \$600M from feds to assist individuals, small firms

By Chris Andrews
Lansing State Journal

Gov. Jennifer Granholm on Thursday laid out a plan to provide affordable health coverage for the 1.1 million Michigan residents now uninsured.

Granholm wants to use existing state money and an anticipated \$600 million in federal funds for a new program available to both individuals and small businesses.

"There are so many people showing up for emergency care that don't have insurance,"

Granholm said. "We want every citizen in Michigan to have access to affordable health care."

Republicans said Granholm's plans remain sketchy.

"We don't have anything from the governor that we can work on," said Ari Adler, spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming.

Granholm said her plan is similar to one recently enacted in Massachusetts, although Michigan's would be voluntary.

The Michigan First Health Care Plan would not only improve citizens' health but lower premiums for people who have insurance, she said.

Granholm needs a federal waiver, triggering the extra money, as well as legislation to make the program a reality. She hopes to have it up and running by next April.

The program would begin with about 550,000 uninsured residents with the lowest incomes. They would be able to select a coverage plan and pay premiums based on a sliding scale.

A public-private partnership would be created to put together a variety of private-market insurance products for individuals and businesses to select.

Sparrow Hospital officials gave the plan initial praise. "It's really about getting people to have access to care at the right level," Chief Executive Officer Dennis Swan said.

Last year, Sparrow provided \$48 million in uncompensated care, he said.

Blue Cross Blue Shield of Michigan spokeswoman Helen Stojic said Blue Cross is enthusiastic about the objectives and likes the idea of using the private marketplace but awaits more details.

Wendy Hofmyer, director of health policy and human resources for the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, said the idea of getting more people insured has merit. But she expressed concern that it could become an expensive entitlement program.

Rob Fowler, president of the Small Business Association of Michigan, said a critical question is how subsidies will work and whether they result in making health coverage affordable.

State Sen. Thomas George, a Republican physician from Kalamazoo, said the first priority should be fixing Medicaid.

Costs are spiraling in large part because of unhealthy behaviors such as smoking and lack of exercise, he said.

"Giving people an insurance card, that's nice, but it doesn't necessarily translate into a healthier population," he said.

Contact Chris Andrews at 377-1054 or candrews@lsj.com.

Granholt looks to expand coverage for uninsured

Friday, May 12, 2006

By Peter Luke
Lansing Bureau

LANSING -- Confident the state will receive federal dollars to provide health insurance for more than a half-million low-income Michigan residents, Gov. Jennifer Granholm is proposing to offer "universal access" coverage for all of the state's 1.1 million uninsured.

Granholm announced in January that the state would pursue new federal Medicaid funding to subsidize insurance coverage for individuals and families in households earning less than 200 percent of federal poverty level, an estimated 550,000 Michigan residents, by next April.

Now that Massachusetts has devised a way to cover all individuals, Granholm Thursday proposed expanding her program to individuals who are self-employed or working in small businesses. Unlike Massachusetts' plan, participation in Michigan would be voluntary.

"We want every citizen in Michigan to have access to health care" through a "quality program at an affordable cost," Granholm said.

After touring the construction site of Sparrow Hospital's new trauma center a mile east of the Capitol, Granholm said her program would reduce the cost of uncompensated medical care, 80 percent of it delivered in emergency rooms to the uninsured. The cost of that care tacks on \$700 per premium annually for those who are insured, she said.

The program would be administered along lines developed this year in Massachusetts by a Democratic Legislature and a Republican governor, Mitt Romney. He is a likely presidential candidate and son of the late Michigan Gov. George Romney.

Michigan's plan involves a state agency, which Granholm called "the exchange," which would link the uninsured with private insurers providing a variety of low-cost insurance options.

Michigan is negotiating with federal officials to secure an additional \$600 million in federal Medicaid money that would provide a basic health insurance package to low-income individuals and families. A family of four earning less than \$38,700 or a single person earning less than \$19,140 would be eligible.

Rob Fowler, president of the Small Business Association of Michigan, said insuring those in poverty under Granholm's plan is a necessary step toward reducing the ranks of the working uninsured.

Absent identifiable sources of revenue, however, providing primary care and hospitalization for all residents is more difficult, Fowler said. Critics say the Massachusetts plan mandating universal health coverage is severely underfunded.

"There is not a problem in Michigan with small business getting access to insurance; the problem is cost," he said. "If this doesn't get after cost, then it's not a solution."

In Massachusetts, employers that don't provide coverage are required to pay \$295 per employee annually to help fund the program. Granholm called that mandate a "health tax," which she said she opposes.

Instead, "we are providing them an offer they can't refuse," through a package of tax incentives, subsidies and lower-cost benefit plans.

Some of that subsidy could come from the federal funding Michigan is seeking. The state would qualify for the federal money with current and anticipated cost savings in the existing Medicaid program that covers nearly 1.5 million Michigan residents, including 800,000 children. Existing spending on mental health care would also be pooled in the new program, which would require a mental health benefit.

"We've been very positively encouraged by the signals that they've been giving us. We're hopeful that we will get approval this year," Granholm said.

Ari Adler, spokesman for Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema, R-Wyoming, said the Legislature has yet to receive "a straight answer on what this is going to cost the state."

"The governor's running around talking like it's a done deal and it's not," he said. "She is making promises we're not sure she's going to be able to keep."

Sharon Parks, an economist with the Michigan League for Human Services, said given Michigan's economy, there are thousands of unemployed bread winners whose families have lost their health insurance.

"There are so many people who are locked out of the health insurance system, it could be very attractive to have some coverage at a price people can afford," Parks said. "If indeed it's affordable."

Governor Pushing for Universal Health Care Coverage

Channel 6 News

May 11, 2006 03:50 PM EDT

Health insurance premiums could go down in Michigan and more people would have coverage. Health coverage for everyone in Michigan is coming if Governor Jennifer Granholm has her way she's giving more details on her universal insurance program. The emergency services director at Sparrow Hospital says he sees a lot of patients without health insurance.

Robert Femia, Emergency Room Doctor: "Because they don't have access to primary care, they present to the ER very ill having heart attacks having strokes."

And the emergency room is basically the only place people without insurance can get care, but Governor Jennifer Granholm says her Michigan first health care plan would change that by giving everyone coverage, minus the financial burden.

Jennifer Granholm, Michigan Governor: "For those of you who do pay premiums, you pay about \$700 extra a year to subsidize those who are uninsured."

She says her billion dollar plan is modeled after something similar in Massachusetts, it works by shifting existing state health care dollars in to the plan, taking advantage of federal matching funds and making insurance easier for small businesses to give to employees.

When an uninsured person comes to the emergency room for care, it's expensive, and people who have insurance, along with the hospital, have to pay for it, and the governor says her plan saves everyone money, and doctors say that's good for everyone.

A house republican spokesman says the governor has not acted on her idea for universal health care for Michigan since she announced the plan in January, and that republicans are skeptical about a plan modeled after Massachusetts, which is a very different state than Michigan.

May 11, 2006

GRANHOLM WOULD DOUBLE HEALTH PLAN, COVERING 1.1M

An expanded health care plan to cover 1.1 million uninsured persons, supported with \$600 million in new federal funds, by April 2007 was announced Thursday by Governor Jennifer Granholm. She said the plan, first outlined in this year's State of the State address, should improve health for low-income persons, lower costs for the insureds who are subsidizing care for the uninsured, and ease the strain on hospital emergency rooms.

Ms. Granholm said the state is negotiating with federal officials for a waiver, good for 10 years, to run the program, which she said is similar to a heralded universal health care program in Massachusetts. Though the aim of the Michigan plan is also universal coverage at an affordable cost, among the key differences is the Michigan plan would not mandate that everyone obtain health care insurance.

The proposed \$1 billion Michigan First Health Care plan would not require new state funds, at least initially. It would use some \$400 million already being spent for mental health and some public health services as a match for the federal funds.

"We want every citizen to have health care," Ms. Granholm said. "We want to revolutionize health care."

Many details are yet to be worked out, and legislation will eventually be needed after the state obtains the federal waiver in order to implement the program.

Businesses and some Republicans complained about the lack of information about the plan, including criticism that the governor is hoping to attract support based on press releases rather than details of a program.

A spokesperson for Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema (R-Wyoming) said because there are no details on how much money would be required and how the plan would work, Mr. Sikkema would not make a comment.

But officials at Sparrow Hospital in Lansing, where Ms. Granholm outlined the new moves after touring an expanded and updated emergency room center now under construction, said the proposal should provide many benefits, including better and more appropriate care for the uninsured.

The state plan would involve partnerships, through a state-run "exchange" which administers an array of options, with health care providers, insurers and businesses that do not now offer health coverage to employees. Businesses could use pre-tax dollars to provide health care for their employees.

While not a mandate like in Massachusetts, which Ms. Granholm said amounts to a health care tax, she views this program as "an offer they can't refuse."

Some 550,000 individuals with incomes below 200 percent of the federal poverty level would get subsidized plans, and another 550,000 who are not insured but have higher incomes would be able to enroll with payments set on a sliding scale.

“This way individuals will have access to primary health care and will not just show up in emergency rooms,” the governor said, adding the plan would promote wellness and wise behaviors.

State officials had said a month ago that universal coverage was the next logical step given the initial proposal to cover just the 550,000 who are at or below the 200 percent of poverty level (See Gongwer Michigan Report, April 13, 2006). The Department of Community Health budget (SB 1083) passed by the Senate includes \$200 million in federal funds for the program, based on the original proposal, and given the projected April, 2006 implementation date.

Ms. Granholm said that like Massachusetts, the Michigan plan would need to be designed so those who are already covered do not “dump” the health care plans they already offer in order to enroll in the government-subsidized program.

Sparrow CEO Dennis Swan said uncompensated care amounts to \$45 million of his hospital system’s \$800 million in health care provided annually, with 85 percent of that due to services provided to the uninsured.

Sparrow officials also say that access to health care will mean that illnesses will be less severe and many emergency room visits can be avoided.

“Without question, hospitals and the Michigan Health and Hospital Association are looking at alternatives because the status quo is not acceptable,” he said. That is true of hospitals across the country, he said, adding that Massachusetts and some other states have staked a lead in addressing the problem of the uninsured.

Ms. Granholm said part of the payoff is expected to be felt by those with insurance, whose costs currently include some \$700 per policy to subsidize the cost for uninsured persons.

And she said that would also help Michigan businesses become more competitive in the global marketplace where other western industrialized countries shoulder the burden of health care rather than private companies.

House Speaker Craig DeRoche (R-Novi) said he’s been working with Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney to understand the plan, and that there are “serious considerations” to be made with that proposal. But he also said that it seems like Ms. Granholm believes she can simply copy the Massachusetts plan for Michigan.

“Michigan needs a Michigan plan,” he said.

Mr. DeRoche said the Massachusetts plan values the private sector and personal responsibility – two key areas he feels the governor wants to scrap with her adaptation. He also said that it’s interesting that Ms. Granholm is already doing away with her health care coverage plan that she just introduced in this year’s State of the State address.

Wendy Hofmeyer, director of health policy and human resources for the Michigan Chamber of Commerce, said it is hard to embrace the plan when so little is known about how it would operate. "Until we see what the waiver application looks like, it's kind of hard to take a position," she said. "They're trying to get people to say, 'yes, we support this' based on a press release."

From what is known, she said the only similarity with Massachusetts is that both would get 550,000 uninsured low-income persons off the Medicaid rolls. "It's expanded Medicaid as far as we're concerned," she said. But she said the argument of dealing with uncompensated care has merit and believes that individuals would likely be healthier if primary coverage is offered.

She said accountability must be part of the program and the big question is what happens after the waiver expires and federal funding is no longer guaranteed. "Coming up with funding for a large program like this is not easy without cutting essential service elsewhere or raising taxes," she said.

Republican Party Chair Saul Anuzis issued a single-sentence response: "A press release is not a plan."

While Ms. Granholm stressed benefits in particular for small business, Mike Rogers, vice president for communications for the Small Business Association of Michigan, said the group was concerned it was not consulted even though its president, Rob Fowler, sits on the governor's Council of Economic Advisors.

The governor said the plan would also reduce overall health care costs by expanded use of technology, some of which makes health care information more portable between providers, and promoting healthier lifestyles.

The coverage provided through plans offered by Blue Cross and private insurers through the "exchange" would run the gamut of managed care, small group market plans, use of pre-tax income for contributions to health plans, and other approaches.

Don't miss deadline to choose drug plan, health advocates say

Friday, May 12, 2006

By Chris Meehan

cmeehan@kalamazoogazette.com 388-8412

Take a deep breath and believe that you can understand and even sign up for the new Medicare Part D drug plan.

Try not to worry that a Monday deadline looms for those who are eligible but have not yet enrolled in the federally funded prescription program.

Realize that, according to a recent Government Accountability Office report, you may need to keep at it if you want all of the right recommendations. The GAO found that some of those who answer phones and should know all of the answers are only human. They can get it wrong.

So there is hope. You simply need to have patience and persistence and arm yourself with information.

First off, you are not alone in having many unanswered questions about the first attempt by the federal government to provide prescription coverage to the elderly and disabled.

Laurie Boyd, office manager for the Paw Paw Village Pharmacy, says that since November she has spoken to more than 700 seniors who have called or come to her with questions about Medicare Part D.

“After I get off the phone with one person, I have another call waiting,” said Boyd, who was designated as the pharmacy’s expert on the new Medicare option for seniors. “For the last week or two, it’s been one call after another for me.”

Boyd said about half of eligible customers at the pharmacy have picked plans. “For the most part, I’m telling people to sign up,” Boyd said. “If they’re unsure of what to do, then I tell them.”

Many other pharmacies also have designated people to field Medicare Part D questions, either over the phone or in person.

Those who sign up before Monday will have coverage starting June 1. But those who fail to sign up can’t get covered until Jan. 1, and then they will have to pay more.

Margaret Patton, a community-relations specialist for Borgess Health, said more than 50 people recently took advantage of a Borgess program that walked them through what was needed to sign up.

“From what I hear, those people felt like a black cloud had been lifted off of them,” Patton said. “The system is so hard to maneuver and understand. They needed the help.”

About 88 percent of elderly or disabled Americans in the government's Medicare insurance program had signed up for the new drug plan, U.S. health officials said on Wednesday.

The figures, showing that some 37 million of 42 million beneficiaries have signed up, drew the ire of critics who called the tally inaccurate.

But forget about the numbers.

Keep this in mind: Many people can save money by signing up with one of the plans. But you need to be careful to make sure that the plan -- there are some 40 of them in Michigan -- is right for you, meaning it offers the medicine you need at the best price. Different plans have different costs and deductibles.

Medicare Part D

Kalamazoo Gazette

Friday, May 12, 2006

Last day to sign up: Monday.

Next enrollment period: Nov. 15 to Dec. 31, 2006.

For more information: A list of the plans available in Michigan is in the back of the handbook "2006 Medicare & You" and online at www.medicare.gov. Or call (800) MEDICARE (633-4227).

Michigan Medicare/Medicaid Assistance Program: (800) 803-7174.

Kalamazoo County's Area Agency on Aging: 373-5147.

Senior Services Inc.: 382-0515.

Allegan County Resource

Development Committee Inc.: 673-5472.

Barry County Commission on Aging: 948-4856.

Van Buren County Area Agency on Aging: (800) 442-2803.

The Senior Information Line: (800) 654-2810.

Friday, May 12, 2006

MySpace teen put on tether Harrison Twp. girl who lied about age faces pretrial hearing May 25; 25-year-old is released.

George Hunter and Steve Pardo / The Detroit News

MOUNT CLEMENS -- The mother of the 13-year-old Harrison Township girl who ran off with a man she met on the Internet was "relieved that her daughter was safe -- and furious about the decision she made," said the girl's attorney, Richard Halprin.

"Her mother had the kind of reaction you often see parents have when their " Halprin kids come home late: 'I'm glad you're safe; now I want to kill you,' said.

The girl was "dumbfounded" by the attention the case garnered, he said.

Halprin called his client "a typical 13-year-old. They don't usually think too many steps ahead, or consider the consequences of their actions. She didn't realize what she did would cause this kind of reaction."

A 25-year-old Indiana man was freed Thursday morning from the Macomb County Jail after officials decided he did not commit a crime by driving the girl across Michigan.

But the girl, who told the man she was 18 after they met through the popular Web site MySpace.com, has been placed on a tether, officials said. She was charged Wednesday in Macomb County Juvenile Court with "home truancy," which prosecutors say is akin to running away from home.

Home truancy is considered a "status offense," or an offense where a crime is not committed, but where behavior of a minor warrants court action.

After the girl's appearance in juvenile court Wednesday, she was released to the custody of her mother. She will remain on a tether until her pretrial hearing, which is scheduled for 2:30 p.m. May 25.

Juvenile court officials set other conditions on the girl, including a ban on using the Internet, said John Ange, chief of the Macomb County Prosecutor's Office juvenile division.

"They were the standard conditions that are usually put on a juvenile: to attend school, and abide by the rules of the home," Ange said. "Basically, they want to ensure we don't have a repeat of what just happened."

Status offenses "are really meant to assist a family so that kids can get their act together before they go out and commit a crime," Ange said.

The Hammond, Ind., man was released from custody pending investigation of his computer, said Therese Tobin, chief trial attorney for the Macomb County Prosecutor's Office.

"As far as we can determine, no crime actually took place," Tobin said.

If the man had sex with the girl, he would have been charged with statutory rape, regardless if he thought she was 18 years old. But that wasn't the case, Tobin said.

"During the interview, they both said they didn't have sex," Tobin said. "The man indicated that he thought she was 18, and the girl said that's what she told him."

An Amber Alert was issued at 11:24 p.m. Tuesday, about two hours after the girl was reported missing by her mother. About two hours later, Kalamazoo County Sheriff's deputies stopped the car. The man's 14-year-old stepbrother was in the car, police said.

Police say the man drove from Hammond and picked up the girl at a shopping center near 16 Mile and Crocker around 9:30 p.m. Tuesday. The girl was with a girlfriend and a former boyfriend when the man picked her up, police said.

The girl gave the man's cell phone number to her girlfriend, in case she wanted to get in touch with her, police said.

The girlfriend became suspicious and called the 13-year-old's mother. The mother called police, who called the cell phone company.

The man's movements were tracked through his cell phone's GPS locator, and police stopped the man's car on Interstate 94.

The girl identifies herself as being 18 years old on her MySpace site. There are pictures on the site of her lounging on a couch in torn jeans and a low-cut shirt. The site contained Playboy bunny logos and vulgar language.

Officials for the L'Anse Creuse Public Schools wouldn't confirm or deny whether the girl attends school in the district.

However, Michelle Irwin, a spokeswoman for the district, said it was sending a letter to parents today.

"It basically just reiterates the importance of Internet safety and gives parents some resources to use to help them with that," Irwin said. "It also says that parents need to monitor their children's use of the Internet."

You can reach George Hunter at (586) 468-7396 or ghunter@detnews.com.

WAYNE COUNTY

County's care of kids is lauded

Wayne Co. fund passes state audit on juvenile system with flying colors

May 12, 2006

BY JACK KRESNAK
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

Though Wayne County's general fund budget has been an auditing mess, the county department working with thousands of abused, neglected or delinquent children and their families passed a recent state fiscal review with flying colors.

Nearly every dollar of the \$52 million spent by the county's Child Care Fund during fiscal year 2005 was approved by the state Department of Human Services, according to a review released Thursday by the county.

The Child Care Fund is the mechanism by which the state and counties split the costs of caring for children in the child welfare and juvenile systems. Generally, the split is 50-50, with the state reimbursing counties for its share of allowable expenses.

The state review, completed May 5, calls Wayne County "a leader in providing innovative programs and services to families and children" and disputed only one item, a \$2,346 auto repair claim.

Wayne County radically changed its juvenile justice system in 2000, stopping routine placements of juvenile delinquents into expensive state custody in favor of a system that keeps most of them in their homes under supervision.

The supervision is managed by a network of private Care Management Systems agencies. Caseworkers monitor the care of delinquents in institutions and family homes. The state review said the caseworkers held "an average of one face-to-face contact per week" with more than 2,000 delinquent youths.

The \$2,346 auto repair bill charged to the Child Care Fund was disallowed because state reimbursement for a car repair is limited to \$500. The state wants to be refunded \$1,173 for the charge, and the county must submit a plan to correct such mistaken billings.

Meanwhile, Wayne County's general fund financial statements for expenditures in fiscal years 2003, 2004 and 2005 still have not been completed due to sloppy bookkeeping uncovered by private accounting firms in audits that have cost the county \$4.53 million so far.

Contact **JACK KRESNAK** at 313-223-4544 or jkresnak@freepress.com.

Tip Investigated In Oakland County Child Killer Case

Police: Man May Be Link In Case

POSTED: 6:20 pm EDT May 11, 2006

UPDATED: 11:11 pm EDT May 11, 2006

A new tip in the Oakland County child killer case has police investigating.

Michigan State Police raided a Lincoln Park home last week after receiving a tip from a federal inmate.

A task force is working to bring evidence against the owner of the home, Randall Raar, 59, who they said may be linked to the Oakland County child killer case.

Inside the home, police found letters written to serial killers, child pornography, 8 mm film dating back to the 1970s, computer files and a sex slave dungeon equipped with shackles and a jail-like door that locked from the outside, Local 4 reported.

Raar is considered a link in the case, and a task force is currently collecting evidence to eliminate him as a suspect in the slaying of four area children.

Raar's background includes charges of child sexual misconduct dating back to 1970, when police said he impersonated a talent scout for a modeling agency to meet girls. His most recent arrest was in 1984 for having sex with a minor, according to police.

The task force met on Thursday to discuss the case. They will go back to the Lincoln Park home to serve another warrant.

Task force members of the Oakland County child killer investigation said there are 10 suspects on the list, but Raar was not one of them; they hope Raar can help them figure out who the child killer is

Man tries to lure girl

Friday, May 12, 2006

The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- A Harrison Park Elementary student said a man enticed her to enter a vehicle outside the school early Thursday. The girl reported the incident about 90 minutes after the alleged contact on Davis Avenue NW, safety director Larry Johnson said. School administrators sent a letter to parents reminding them to talk with their children about safety. Police are investigating.

WAYNE COUNTY

42 cats taken from house

Pungent raid in GP Farms comes as occupant is charged with theft

May 12, 2006

BY JOHN MASSON
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

A Grosse Pointe Farms pet theft investigation that started in January peaked in a foul-smelling raid this week in which 42 cats, three dogs and six birds were confiscated. Sylvia Gray, 57, a former volunteer with a nonprofit animal adoption agency, was arraigned Wednesday in municipal court on a misdemeanor warrant charging larceny. The charge stemmed from an investigation that started when officials from All About Animals Rescue told police that Gray refused to return up to 20 cats in her care after her relationship with the agency ended.

However, at the arraignment, Gray insisted that she shared her home only with her 14-year-old son, 15-year-old daughter, two cats and two dogs.

But once officials arrived at the modest wood-frame house for a court-mandated inspection the same day, they found a very different story.

"I just can't believe anyone lived there, really," Detective Lt. Rich Rosati said. "What we found was absolutely deplorable."

Animals hid in rafters, piles of feces covered floors, and the house had very little furniture, Rosati said. The few litter boxes overflowed, and the choking smell of cat urine nearly drove him from the home, he said.

At first, Rosati said, Gray balked during the hearing at the inspection and its immediacy. "She kind of looked concerned about that," Rosati said. "She asked for a week, but the prosecutor said no, it had to be that day. She kind of balked at that, but ended up letting us in."

With the help of animal control officials, police captured 42 cats over three hours, but Rosati wasn't sure they got all of them.

"These people were diligent," Rosati said. "They were awesome. They went into conditions that were not healthy for them."

Other problems loom for Gray. Authorities called the state **Family Independence Agency**, which is conducting its own investigation on the welfare of Gray's children. The house itself, on a short block of homes on Lakeview off Kercheval, may end up condemned.

"You walk around in that filth and that stench, and you wonder, how does someone live here?" Rosati said.

For now Gray is free on bond and the children remain in the home, Rosati said.

No one answered the door at the home Thursday afternoon, and neighbors declined to comment on the case. No one returned a phone message left Thursday evening at All About Animals Rescue, located in Eastpointe.

Rosati said the case saddened him.

"This is a person with a good heart," Rosati said. "She just got attached to all these cats and couldn't let them go."

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Published May 12, 2006
[From the Lansing State Journal]

Michigan retailers recommend changes to food stamp system

By Sarah Karush
Associated Press

DETROIT - With the flip of each calendar page, the aisles of K&G Food Mart are flooded with shoppers. But as the weeks wear on, the traffic slows to a trickle.

The cycle, familiar to many inner-city grocers, has a simple explanation: The start of the month is when people get food stamps.

A group of small retailers and wholesalers in Michigan is asking for a change in the way the state Administers the federal assistance program. They hope that spreading out food-stamp distributions can eliminate such swings in customer traffic, which make it difficult to keep stores adequately stocked, and wreaks havoc on suppliers' delivery schedules.

On Monday, the Michigan Food Policy Council, a state advisory body, is scheduled to vote on the issue as part of a set of recommendations to Gov. Jennifer Granholm on ways to increase the number of stores selling fresh food in low-income areas.

While store owners say their food is always fresh, they acknowledge that the selection is better on days When they expect more sales.

In Michigan, each of the 512,000 households on food stamps receives them on one of the first nine day of the month. The funds are transferred electronically onto each recipient's Michigan Bridge Card, used like a debit card.

But many Detroit retailers say the nine-day spread is not enough. The Associated Food and Petroleum

Dealers of Michigan is asking the state to divide each recipient's food stamps into two payments per month, something federal law allows, but no states currently do. The group says such a system would both ease the situation for businesses and help families budget more effectively.

"If we could get a twice-monthly distribution, it would help us maintain the product in the store," said Najib Atisha, who owns two supermarkets in Detroit and estimates that at least 25 percent of his revenue comes from food stamps.

Maureen Sorbet, a spokeswoman for the Michigan Department of Human Services, which handles the distribution of food stamps, said the department is evaluating the retailers' proposal, but is concerned about the potential costs.

Even if a new system isn't more expensive to run, it would involve initial transition costs, such as a spike in customer service calls from confused recipients.

Wal-Mart settlement garners \$20,000 for Kids Food Basket

Friday, May 12, 2006

By Nate Reens
The Grand Rapids Press

GRAND RAPIDS -- A program that feeds hungry children will benefit from Wal-Mart's failure to put prices on each retail item.

Attorney General Mike Cox was expected to be in Grand Rapids today to announce a \$20,000 grant to Kids Food Basket, an agency that feeds as many as 800 students a day during the school year, 500 in the summer.

The money comes from a \$1.5 million settlement. Cox had accused the giant retailer of failing to price goods in stores around the state.

"It's definitely an unexpected but very welcome gift," said Mark Cebula, treasurer of the hunger relief agency. "A good, nutritious supper can help bring these students back to school and ready to learn rather than focusing on being limited by their hunger."

The cash infusion represents 10 percent of the agency's annual \$200,000 budget, Cebula said. The settlement with Wal-Mart, announced last month, protects consumers by clearly showing prices and also helps the needy around the state, Cox spokesman Nate Bailey said.

"There's a lot of families in tough situations, and this will help," he said.

SafePlace worker arrested for denying officer access to shelter

STACY LANGLEY, The Huron Daily Tribune

05/10/2006

BAD AXE — An employee of SafePlace was arrested at the domestic abuse shelter Monday after she repeatedly refused to let a lieutenant from the Bad Axe Police Department enter the shelter even though he was responding to a call (from the shelter to Huron Central Dispatch) requesting an ambulance for a women staying there.

The 48-year-old Bad Axe woman, whose name is not being released at this time, is being charged with two counts of assaulting/resisting and obstructing Bad Axe Police Lt. David Rothe from performing his duty as a police officer. She is expected to be arraigned on charges Thursday in Huron County District Court.

Police reports indicate the woman's arrest came after a 9-1-1 call to Huron Central Dispatch requested an ambulance for the shelter. The caller said the ambulance was for "a lady with a back injury" at the shelter and came into dispatch at 7:10 a.m. Monday.

Medical personnel from Huron Central Ambulance, along with Rothe, working for the Bad Axe Police Department at the time, were dispatched to the shelter.

Rothe arrived first in a fully marked patrol car. He reports he went to the door and was not allowed inside by the shelter employee who answered the door. Police reports indicate the employee also refused to confirm for Rothe if the shelter had requested an ambulance.

Rothe reports he told the employee he was responding to the ambulance call, and as the first responding person at the scene he would check the injured person and notify the ambulance of any additional information, medical or otherwise, that would assist them in their response.

Bad Axe Police Chief John Bodis said the officer would then traditionally wait with the injured person until the ambulance personnel arrived and assist further if needed.

According to Huron County Prosecutor Mark J. Gaertner, there is no law or privilege to any shelter in the state of Michigan that would prohibit an employee from letting a police officer, firefighter, or emergency medical responder on the premises.

"This is a problem that has been discussed before," said Gaertner, who explained police officers weren't being allowed into the shelter to serve subpoenas or interview victims of domestic violence prior to Monday's incident.

“There was a reason that SafePlace was put next to (Huron Central) dispatch, and there was a reason that it was put inside the city of Bad Axe,” said Gaertner, who was at the forefront of the effort to bring the shelter to Huron County.

“Simply, we wanted it to be a safe place. Domestic violence shelters used to be out in the middle of the woods — out in the middle of nowhere where no one would find out about them, it’s not that way anymore. Number one, people find out about them, number two, this place is service oriented. It’s not just a place to house victims, but it’s a place to offer services to the people who need them. It’s a prevention center as much as a shelter. Victims can go there before the police ever have to be called.”

Gaertner said it’s a “strange situation” because officers are doing their job — often putting themselves in harm’s way when responding to domestic disputes — and trying to do the right thing, from arrests to seeing the case to his office. Then, in the latter stages of the process, officers have been finding themselves denied access to the victim.

Gaertner said the SafePlace employee is facing two charges because at two different times Monday Rothe was denied access into the shelter.

“The officer (Rothe) goes out there the first time for a medical emergency — a lot of times that first person on the scene is the one that gets to the bottom of things and really has things in order for the medical personnel to come in and do what needs to be done to get the person the medical attention they need as quickly as possible,” he said.

Gaertner said Rothe was denied access to the shelter again when he returned after learning the medical emergency at the shelter wasn’t for a back related injury but for a drug overdose. That made it necessary for him to investigate what occurred there. On his return trip Rothe was accompanied by Elizabeth V. Weisenbach, assistant prosecuting attorney and SafePlace board member, who instructed the SafePlace employee to allow Rothe into the shelter. According to police reports, Weisenbach’s requests were both physically and verbally denied.

“The management has been told to cooperate with police — this has been brought up at meetings that these were the problems police were having,” Gaertner said. “I commend him (Rothe) for using such restraint on Monday. He had every legal right to use forced entry to get inside under those emergency circumstances, and he had every right to use physical force to respond to this medical emergency. The only time you can resist an officer is if you are trying to resist an illegal arrest. You can not resist for an officer trying to perform his duty.

“The second time Rothe went out there (to the shelter) that day was for the criminal investigation on the drug overdose, and he’s denied admission again. The police should be their best friend out there.”

Michael Gage, SafePlace board member, said Tuesday he was aware there were problems in the beginning when Executive Director Tamara Richardson was still employed by the

shelter and police officers were not being allowed inside. But Gage said he thought those problems had been resolved after the board asked Weisenbach and Sgt. Brian Wisenbaugh, a board member and employee of the Huron County Sheriff's Office, to speak to Richardson about the law and the shelter's policy.

"I was under the impression it was all worked out until I got the call from (Bad Axe Police Chief) John Bodis that his office had not been able to gain access," Gage said. "This is a matter that will certainly be discussed at our meeting on Thursday night.

"At first when I heard about all of this I felt badly for our employee who possibly thought she was doing something right, following protocol. I don't know how the volunteers were trained, I was not there. I felt bad for the staff person and the Bad Axe Police, who I feel was doing everything correctly. If our (SafePlace) policy was wrong and had not been changed, the mistake was on our part and will be corrected so it will not happen again. We want a smooth relationship with law enforcement. This will not happen again, things will change and law enforcement will be aware of our policy."

Gaertner said he worried a problem at the shelter left unmanaged could have "a chilling effect all over.

"Just imagine a business owner who has an emergency in their back room saying to police 'you can't come in here.' Here in this case we have Rothe sitting out there and waiting for the ambulance to arrive on scene, wasting valuable response time, and he's not allowed to go in," he said. "Then he finds out that the woman inside doesn't have a back injury but had some prescription drugs that she had taken — and likely had a drug overdose — and we know that in the first 30-45 minutes are the most important to the person's medical treatment. You have got to respond quickly, and he's not allowed to.

"If someone had died out there, I can't even imagine. Police officers have the responsibility to see a call through to the end. Her actions affected every tax payer in the city of Bad Axe. If something bad would have happened, the city of Bad Axe would have been liable. If Rothe hadn't done what he did, the city would be on the line. I don't believe this should be a reflection on the people who are involved in the shelter, but I do think that this is a wakeup call to the shelter. I think some of the board members are taking this very seriously.

Gaertner said the city was extremely involved in making the shelter a reality. "Looking back to when plans for the shelter were in the works, John Bodis and (City Manager) John Nugent stuck their necks out for this shelter and so the shelter would be in a place that had 24-hour police protection," he said. "It was put next to the dispatch center where usually there is a police car or two over there so they would have that sense of security."

Gage said about a month and a half ago the board let Richardson go, that because of "budget cuts the position was eliminated.

“The day-to-day operations now are in the hands of Director Amy Kain and our bookkeeper, they have been picking up the extra duties,” Gage said. “We’ve been able to make a positive turn in the budget process. We don’t want to have a shelter and have no money to operate it with. We are paying our bills. We’ve made a mistake. I don’t feel it was intentional. We have to learn from this and move on and say ‘OK, this has to be changed’ and explain to law enforcement before they come knocking on the door. I don’t feel the services to the people of SafePlace have been hurt.”

According to police reports, Kain also instructed the SafePlace employee to let Rothe inside, but her orders were ignored.

The charges the SafePlace employee faces carry a possible punishment of up to two years in jail and/or a \$2,000 fine.

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Unger's attorney grills state police Crime scene is rife with shoddy investigation methods, says lawyer for man accused of killing wife.

Mike Martindale / The Detroit News

BEULAH -- The defense attorney for a Huntington Woods man charged with murder went on the offensive Thursday, chipping away at the findings of police investigators and questioning the thoroughness of the crime scene investigation by the Michigan State Police.

Robert S. Harrison's client, Mark Unger, 45, is charged in Benzie Circuit Court with first-degree murder in the October 2003 death of his wife, Florence, at a lakeside resort in northern Michigan.

During the trial, Harrison has questioned several aspects of the investigation, including:

- ☐ Crime-scene photographs of the railing through which Florence Unger fell or was pushed, dated Nov. 5 -- taken 11 days after her body was found.
- ☐ Florence Unger's body floated in the lake for at least 12 hours after it was found, until evidence technicians removed it.
- ☐ The core temperature of the body, an essential measurement used to determine time of death, was never taken.
- ☐ The police report contained no mention of fibers of clothing or other material, despite a weathered steel breakwall that likely would have collected clothing fibers had someone been dragged over it.

At one point Thursday, an exasperated Harrison tried unsuccessfully to get state police forensic scientist Francis D'Angela to identify a green material on a white railing in photographs of the boathouse.

"Do you know what algae is? Do you know what moss is?" asked Harrison, who, in his opening statement, said the railing and deck's slippery surface could have contributed to Florence Unger's accidental death.

After Harrison opined that the state police reports were replete with deficiencies, D'Angela countered: "We don't find it necessary to detail everything we've done."

Michigan Assistant Attorney General Donna L. Pendergast had Jennifer Patchin and D'Angela, both of the Grayling crime lab, detail the boathouse scene at the Inn of Watervale resort.

Broken glass from candle holders and some partly melted candles were scattered across the platform, along with a silver-posted earring containing a clear gemstone. Twelve feet above the platform, pillars from a boathouse deck railing had splintered and broken.

"There was an area from the pool of blood (on the concrete) and to the breakwall that was void of blood," testified Patchin, a state police forensic scientist, recalling findings of Oct. 25, 2003.

You can reach Mike Martindale at (248) 647-7226 or *mmartindale@detnews.com*

Forensic specialist testifies in trial of Unger

Associated Press

BEULAH - Crime scene evidence took center stage Thursday during the trial of a suburban Detroit man accused of killing his wife at a northern Michigan resort.

Francis D'Angela, a forensic scientist with the state police crime lab in Grayling, described photographs she took after Florence Unger, 37, was found dead in Lower Herring Lake on Oct. 25, 2003. The Huntington Woods woman and her family were on a weekend visit to the Watervale resort in southwestern Benzie County.

Her husband, Mark Unger, is charged with first-degree murder. Prosecutors say he moved his wife into the water and drowned her after she fell or was pushed from a flat boathouse roof to a concrete apron and knocked unconscious. Defense attorneys say the death was accidental.

Some of D'Angela's crime scene photos were of Florence's body floating in less than a foot of water alongside the breakwall. Testifying in circuit court, D'Angela described where blood was found a few feet away on the concrete pad and also dripping from a blue blanket hung on a boat hoist. As investigators took DNA swab samples from Unger, he asked if his wife was still in the water, D'Angela said.

"When he was told she was he became noticeably upset, sobbing loudly, but I never noticed any tears," D'Angela said.

Defense attorney Robert Harrison questioned the thoroughness of the police investigation.

At one point, he tried unsuccessfully to get D'Angela to identify green-colored material on a white railing photographs.

In his opening statement last week, he said the boathouse railing and deck's slippery surface could have contributed to Florence Unger's accidental death.

Jurors see photos of death scene

Defense focuses on evidence that wasn't collected

BY PATRICK SULLIVAN
psullivan@record-eagle.com

May 12, 2006

BEULAH — Prosecutors showed jurors dozens of photographs of a boathouse deck where Florence Unger was last seen alive, as well as images of her body floating in shallow water at the edge of Lower Herring Lake.

Mark Unger's defense attorneys Thursday focused on uncollected evidence and what was not included in a state police scientist's report.

The fifth day of testimony in Unger's first-degree murder trial turned to forensic evidence after several days of prosecution witnesses who knew the Ungers or who came across the couple on their final weekend together at Watervale Resort in October 2003.

Unger is accused of pushing his wife from the deck onto a concrete slab below and dragging her into the lake. Unger maintains his innocence and his attorneys argue the death was an accident.

Francis D'Angela, a state police forensic scientist, testified about evidence she collected after Florence Unger's body was found in the water.

D'Angela told Donna Pendergast, an assistant attorney general who is prosecuting the case for Benzie County, that Mark Unger asked her if his wife was still in the water, hours after her body was found. It was, she said.

"He got very upset, sobbing very loudly, but I never noticed any tears," D'Angela said.

Pendergast spent much of the day showing jurors pictures of the boathouse deck. D'Angela and another forensic witness described in great detail a damaged railing, bowed posts, and a blood stain on the concrete platform.

Defense attorney Robert Harrison grilled D'Angela about findings left out of her report, such as the fact investigators found no clothing fibers on the concrete platform or metal breakwall where Unger is accused of dragging his wife into the lake.

D'Angela said she could not include everything in her report.

"If we would write everything in a report it would be a novel, it would be really thick," she said.

Also left out of the report was the test of a stain on Mark Unger's jeans that was negative for blood.

"So once again, you didn't put something that was helpful to Mark Unger in your report, right?" Harrison asked her.

Testimony is scheduled to resume today.

Kathleen Ann Jones

JONES, Kathleen Ann -- Age 57, of Swartz Creek, died Wednesday, May 10, 2006 at Brian's House Hospice in Davison. Private services will be held. Those desiring may make contributions to the North End Soup Kitchen. Kathleen was born March 12, 1949 in Detroit. She was a graduate of Wayne State University. She married Theodore G. Jones on July 7, 1989. Mrs. Jones was the director of the Bay and Arenac County Family Independence Agency. She enjoyed her family and friends, and gardening. She was a true humanitarian. Surviving are: husband Theodore; two step-daughters, Autumn Marie Jones, Heather Michelle and husband John Browning; three grandchildren, Diana Jo, Garret Blake, and Hunter James. She was preceded in death by her parents, Floyd Bennett and Betty Holtshooter. Friends may extend condolences or share a tribute at www.sharpfuneralhomes.com.